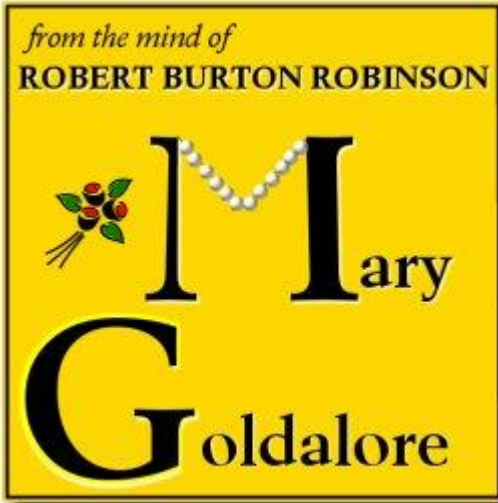


Mary Goldalore

by Robert Burton Robinson



GENRE: Suspense/Crime. LENGTH: 3,525 words. SYNOPSIS: Mary Goldalore is very attractive, wealthy divorcee in her mid-thirties. She's also a bit naive—making her a prime candidate for a con artist's scheme.

A tall, slender woman in her mid-thirties spotted the two wealthy-looking women about her age at the end of the bar. She picked up her martini, walked over and sat down next to them. “Are you ladies expecting company?”

Mary and Sylvia were overdressed, even for this fancy nightclub.

“I’m afraid not,” said Mary.” She saw the woman’s eyes go to her chest. It was hard to tell whether she was admiring

Mary's ample cleavage or the four-thousand dollar cultured pearls draped across it.

"Hi. I'm Dolly Otterman."

"I'm Mary Goldalore." When she held out her hand, Mary's diamond bracelet seemed to catch every light in the room. It was stunning, and she enjoyed showing it off.

"Sylvia Partov."

Sylvia's jewels were also quite impressive.

"I don't believe I've ever seen you two in here before," said Dolly.

"It's my first time," said Mary, sounding like a virgin in every sense of the word.

"Mine too," said Sylvia.

Dolly leaned in. "It's a great place to pick up men."

"Really? I was *hoping* to meet a nice gentleman," said Mary, surveying the room.

"Well, believe me—it's easy. I do it all the time," said Dolly.

Mary noticed the wedding ring. "But you're married."

Dolly shrugged. "Sort of."

"What does that mean?"

"Weekends only."

“I see—one of those *open* marriages.”

Sylvia began to squirm.

Dolly finished off her martini. “Did you see that hunk over there?”

“Where?”

“The guy sitting in the booth by himself.”

“Okay, yeah, I see him.”

“He is super hot. And loaded.”

Mary took a second look. “Then why is he alone?”

“He’s kinda shy. I went out with him once. Tried to take him to the *rabbit ranch*—if you know what I mean.”

“Huh?”

“You know—the horizontal hippie dance.”

The bartender overheard, and offered Mary a translation. “She tried to *do* him.”

“Oh,” said Mary. This Dolly person was a bit on the raunchy side.

“But he wouldn’t go for it,” said Dolly. “He told me he was looking for *true* love. How stupid is that? No wonder he’s sitting alone. So, I just thanked him for the nice dinner, and that was that.”

“Hmm,” said Mary.

“But we’re still buds. So, you want to meet him?”

“Oh, I don’t know if I—”

“—look, you came here to meet a man, right? And this is a nice guy—probably just your type. What do you say? I love playing matchmaker.” She looked over at Sylvia. “And then I can hook *you* up with somebody, Sylvia.”

“You know what?” said Sylvia with a nervous smile. “I believe I hear my husband calling me.” She grabbed her purse and stood up.

“Okay,” said Mary, “I understand.”

“See you tomorrow at the club,” said Sylvia.

“Okay, bye,” said Mary.

“So, Mary? You want to meet him or not?” said Dolly.

“I guess so.”

“Yeah, come on.” Dolly slid off the bar stool. “His name is Kyle Pickerpan.”

Mary followed her to Kyle’s booth. She casually checked the faces at each table as she walked by. Who was watching her do this? Anybody she knew? Then she spotted Jennifer, sitting with another woman in the booth adjacent to Kyle’s. She was one of Mary’s close friends—known to be a voracious

cious gossip. Hopefully she would just mind her own business tonight.

“Hello, Kyle,” said Dolly. “How are you this evening?”

He smiled. “I’m fine, Dolly.” Up close, he looked younger and even more handsome.

“Well, I’d like to introduce you to my new friend. This is Mary...”

“Goldalore,” said Mary.

Kyle slid out of the booth and stood up.

He was about six foot, but his sleek build made him seem even taller.

“And this,” said Dolly, “is Kyle Pickerpan—ladies man.”

Kyle appeared to be slightly embarrassed. “Glad to meet you, Mary.”

“Okay, then,” said Dolly. “I’m gonna leave you two love birds alone.” She walked off.

“Dolly’s a little rough around the edges,” said Kyle.

“Yes, I noticed.”

“Please join me. He offered Mary a seat at his booth.

“Well, okay—just for a minute.” She sat down across from him—well aware that Jennifer was right behind her, and would hear every word that was said.

“I just moved here to Atlanta a couple of weeks ago. I bought a lovely old home in Tuxedo Park.”

Homes in that subdivision appraised for five to ten million dollars.

Kyle went on. “Frankly, the house is too big for me. But I just fell in love with that area. I’m having the house renovated. Right now I’m staying at the Omni.”

“That’s a nice hotel.”

“Yes. But I can’t wait to get moved into the house.”

“So, it’s just you? No family?”

“No. I’m still looking for Miss Right.”

“You must be very patient.”

“Why do you say that? Because I’m old?”

“No—I’m sorry. That was so rude. Please forgive me.”

He smiled. “No problem. Actually, I get that a lot. But so many of the women I meet are just looking to strike it rich. So, I have to be careful.”

“I know what you mean.”

“So, I assume you’re divorced.”

“Yes, for two years,” said Mary. “But what made you think I was divorced? Couldn’t I have been like you—still waiting for *Mr. Right*?”

He laughed. “Are you kidding me? Look at you. You’re just too beautiful to have made it this long without some guy winning you over.”

“Thanks...I think.”

“Hopefully he didn’t marry you for your money.”

“No. He had his own money. That wasn’t the problem. He just turned out to be a major jerk.”

“You were lucky then.”

“*Lucky?*”

“He could have taken half your wealth.”

“Well, yes, I suppose I was lucky in *that* sense. But I was miserable for seven years, so I don’t feel very lucky.”

“How many years were you married?”

“Seven and a half.”

He laughed. “Why did you stay in a bad marriage for so long?”

“Because of my mother. I still remember her exact words: *I forbid you to marry him*. Then, at the wedding reception, she pulled me aside and told me I would be divorced within a year. I *had* to prove her wrong.”

“Well, sure. I can understand that. But why did you stick it out for all those years? Wouldn’t *one* year have proved her wrong?”

“Yes, it *would* have—if she hadn’t kept telling me I was being stupid for not divorcing him.”

He smiled. “Forgive me for saying so, but you seem to be rather stubborn.”

“Only when it comes to my mother.”

“So, why did you finally give in and get the divorce?”

“My mother died.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did you two ever settle your differences?”

“Not really. But we *did* love each other. Arguing was just something we liked to do. I never fully realized it until her death, but those were our most fun times together.”

“To each his own, I guess.”

“Yeah, I know. Weird, huh? I don’t usually talk about this—especially on a first—”

“—date?”

“No, I mean—”

“—it’s okay. It really does feel like a date. Let’s get out of here.”

“And go where?”

“Well, we could go to my—never mind. That sounds like I’m trying to get you into bed.”

“What? Your hotel room? No, I didn’t think that at all. I can see what kind of man you are. You wouldn’t try to take advantage of me. But let’s go to my house. I’ve got a huge fireplace. We can relax on the couch and talk. And have a glass of wine.”

He smiled as he took her hand. “Sounds great.”

She took out her cell phone.

“Charles? I’m ready to go home. And I have a guest...Thanks.”

“Charles will be here with the limo by the time we walk out front,” said Mary.

“Charles is your chauffeur?”

“Chauffeur and butler. He’s been with me for years.”

Mary sat with Kyle on the plush leather couch in her den, talking and watching the flames flicker in the fireplace.

Charles brought them two glasses and a \$150 bottle of Pinot Noir.

After several glasses, Kyle moved over closer to her. He began to kiss her and she began to melt. But when she felt his fingers fidgeting with her bra strap, she pulled away.

“No, no,” she said. “None of that. Remember: you’re saving yourself for Miss Right.”

“I think I’ve found her.” He leaned in for another kiss.

She held him back. “It’s late. Time for bed.”

His face lit up.

“Correction: time for *sleep*.”

“Ah, come on, Baby.”

“I’ll get Charles to drive you to your hotel.”

Kyle made Mary agree to out with him for lunch the next day.

Mary had selected an exclusive restaurant downtown.

“So, nice to see you again, Mrs. Goldalore,” said the head waiter.

She ordered a chef salad. Kyle had a sirloin steak.

“I love this city,” said Kyle.

“So, you plan to stay for a while?” said Mary.

“Definitely.”

“Good.”

“And I hope to spend a lot of time with you.”

“Wonderful.”

They had a nice conversation while they ate. Just after their bill had been delivered, the head waiter had dropped by for assurances that the quality of both the food and the service had been superb.

“Mary, maybe I’m way off base,” said Kyle, as he looked deep into her eyes, “but I really think we could have something very special together.”

She smiled warmly. “I think you may be right.”

He picked up her hand and kissed it.

“You know what?” she said.

“What?”

“Let’s celebrate.”

“Okay. Great,” he said.

“Let’s go.”

He threw two one-hundred dollar bills on the table as though they were worthless scraps of paper.

She took his hand and led him out of the restaurant, down the sidewalk to a jewelry store.

When they walked inside, he said, "So, you're ready for an engagement ring?"

"No, silly."

He looked disappointed.

"Not yet. Maybe in a few weeks," she said playfully.

A salesman already had his eyes and ears focused on them.

"I love jewelry," she said. "Ooh. Look at this ring."

The salesman stepped up, took it out of the glass cabinet and showed it to her. "This would be a lovely addition to your collection, Mrs. Goldalore."

"How much, George?"

Kyle didn't seem at all surprised that the Mary and the jeweler knew each other by name.

"Twenty-five," he said.

She turned to Kyle. "Would like to buy it for me, Kyle?"

Kyle swallowed hard. "Uh, sure."

She lowered her voice. "If you ask me to marry you in a couple of weeks and I say 'Yes,' this can be my engagement ring. But I really want it now."

“No problem,” said Kyle, smiling. “Wrap it up for her, George.”

George happily did just that.

“Twenty-five hundred, right?” said Kyle, handing George his American Express card.

“No, Sir. It’s twenty-five *thousand*.”

“Oh,” said Kyle, as his face turned pale.

“Is that okay, Kyle?” said Mary. Then she whispered, “I can cover it—if it’s a problem.”

Kyle cleared his throat and tried to smile. “No problem.”

“Deliver it to your home as usual, Mrs. Goldalore?” said George.

“Yes, thank you,” said Mary. She turned to Kyle. “I don’t like to walk out of here wearing a brand new piece of expensive jewelry. It’s just asking to get mugged. I’ll wear it to dinner.” She had assumed that a dinner invitation was forthcoming.

Kyle called his driver, and within a few minutes his rented limo pulled up outside the jewelry store. Mary would go home, take a nap, and freshen up for dinner.

At 5:00 p.m. Kyle’s limo pulled up in front of Mary’s mansion. It was to be a very formal evening.

Kyle walked up the steps with a dozen roses in hand, and rang the doorbell.

A very attractive woman opened the door. She certainly was not a maid. She looked a lot like Mary.

“You must be Mary’s sister.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Kyle Pickerpan. Mary and I have dinner plans.”

“I’m afraid you’ve got the wrong address.”

“No. I was here this morning with Mary. And last night.”

“Mary who?”

“Mary Goldalore,” he said.

She stared at him for a moment. “That’s impossible—because *I’m* Mary Goldalore.”

He hesitated. “Is this some kind of a joke?” He tried to look around her, to see inside. “Mary?”

“Sir, I’m the only Mary in this house.”

“Let me talk to Charles, the chauffeur—he’ll tell you.”

“Okay. You’re going to have to leave now or I’m going to call the police.”

“It’s okay,” said a familiar voice from inside the house.

“Mary?” said Kyle.

His Mary joined the other Mary in the doorway.

“What’s going on here, Mary?” said Kyle.

“I’m not really Mary Goldalore. She is.”

“Then who are you?” said Kyle.

“My name is Janice. You might remember me as a brunette,” she said, pulling off the blonde wig.

“I don’t know *who* you are,” said Kyle, “but I want my ring back.”

“You really don’t remember me? It was about a year ago in Little Rock. I borrowed some jewelry and a dress from my employer and went to a nightclub. When you’re a maid it’s hard to get dates with well-to-do men. I figured if a guy thought I was wealthy he would give me a chance. Then he could get to know the real me.”

Kyle seemed to recognize Janice, but he didn’t say a word.

“And you did give me a chance. But when you took me home that night, you drugged me and stole my borrowed jewelry. The next morning a realtor woke me up. He was showing the house to potential buyers. And it wasn’t even your house.”

“That wasn’t *me*,” said Kyle. “You’ve got me confused with somebody else.”

“Gee, then that’s quite a coincidence, since *his* name was *also* Kyle Pickerpan.”

The real Mary spoke up. “So, Mr. Pickerpan, shall we call the police to discuss the ring? Or would you just like to call it even?”

He began to step backwards, toward the limo. “You women are crazy. I don’t know who this man is that you’re talking about, or why he’s using my name. But I’m gonna find out.” He opened the limo door. “Just keep the stupid ring.” He got in and slammed the door. The limo drove away.

The two women began to laugh.

“We got him good, Janice.”

“Yes, we did. Thanks for all your help. And it was so nice of your friend, Sylvia, to go with me last night. I don’t think I could have pulled it off without her help.”

“What about that Dolly woman—you think she was Kyle’s partner?”

“Definitely. She was just waiting at the bar, looking for prospects. She might have already talked to several women before we came in. Maybe they were married, or not rich enough. Who knows?”

“And then she saw you and Sylvia walk in—”

“—wearing tons of jewelry. But I would have been too nervous without Sylvia. Dolly would have seen right through me. I’m not much of an actress.”

“Oh, but you *are*.”

“Well, yeah, I guess I did okay, huh?”

“You totally fooled her and Kyle.”

“But I really thought I was in trouble when I saw your friend, Jennifer, sitting in the next booth.”

Mary laughed. “Yeah, I’m surprised she didn’t say something. But I guess she was too busy listening. She called me this morning to tell me what she’d heard. Of course, she had already spread the story about my maid going around pretending to be me. Now she feels pretty foolish.”

“Serves her right.”

“Well, I’m just glad you spotted Kyle yesterday morning when you were in town. I’m surprised you recognized him. You were only with him that one night. And that was a year ago.”

“Are you kidding, Mary? I’ll never forget that face.”

“Well, now you’ve finally got your money back.”

“Thanks for writing me the check. Are you sure George will take the ring back?”

“Oh, yes. It’s no problem. We’ve done business for years.”

“He was great, by the way.”

“He called after you two left. I think he enjoyed being in on it.”

“Well, okay then. I’ve got my car packed, so I’ll head out now.”

“Please be careful. And let me know how you’re doing.”

“I will.”

“Maybe your mom’s health will take a turn for the better. I know it’s going to be tough caring for her around the clock.”

“Yes. But what else can I do? She’s my mother.”

The two women hugged and Janice walked out to her car and drove off.

“It was a perfect plan—the best ever,” said Janice, who was sitting in the front passenger seat of the Chevy Suburban.

“You *were* a very believable Mary Goldalore,” said Dolly from the back seat.

“I think all three of us deserve Oscars,” said Kyle, steering onto a two-lane road.

“I know you think we should stay off the main highway, Kyle, but this is kind of ridiculous,” said Janice.

“Yeah, look how dark it is,” said Dolly. “There’s not even any moonlight. If the car dies and the battery goes dead we won’t even be able to see our own hands in front of our faces.”

“Oh, Dolly,” said Janice, “don’t so melodramatic.”

“Well,” said Kyle, “we just need to get as far away from Mary Goldalore as possible right now.”

“Quit worrying,” said Janice. “There’s no way Mary has figured out that I replaced all her jewels with fakes. It would take a jeweler to tell the difference. She won’t know for months—or maybe even years. And even then, she’ll never suspect *me*. We’re like sisters.” She laughed.

“I’m just playing it safe,” said Kyle.

Suddenly there were headlights behind them—approaching fast. Then they saw the flashing lights and heard the siren.

“Were you speeding?” yelled Dolly.

“No,” said Kyle. “Maybe a taillight went out. I don’t know. But we’ll be fine if we just stay cool. Put the bag of jewelry on the floorboard, Dolly—under your feet.”

Kyle pulled over. They heard a car door open and close. Then they saw a very bright flashlight coming up from the rear. They couldn’t see the man holding it. They could only hear his voice.

“Kyle Pickerpan?”

How could this cop know his name? Had Mary Goldaloro somehow already realized she'd been conned?

"I need you to get out and step to the rear of the car—all three of you."

Janice thought the voice seemed familiar.

The three criminals got out and went to the back of the Suburban. They still couldn't see the officer—only his blinding flashlight.

"Okay," said the cop, "I'm going to give you a chance."

The three looked at each other. What was he talking about?

"I'm going to count to three...before I start shooting."

There was no time to react. The cop said, "Three," and began firing.

Janice lunged to the side and fell into a deep ditch that ran alongside the road. She heard Kyle grunt and then heard Dolly scream just before their bodies fell lifelessly to the ground.

She tried to run away, but her feet kept slipping in the mud. Then the beam of his flashlight found her, and she knew it was over.

"You can't get away from me," he said.

Suddenly Janice knew his identity. It wasn't a policeman at all. It was—.

Before she could finish her thought, there was a flash at the muzzle, a bullet through the brain.

“Could I please have another cup of coffee, Charles,” said Mary.

“Yes, Ma’am,” he quickly picked up the pot, walked over to the breakfast nook and filled her cup. “Beautiful morning, Ma’am.”

“Yes, it certainly is.” She took a sip of her coffee. “Are you absolutely sure you want to move to Miami? I hear it’s a lot more humid down there than it is here in Atlanta.”

“I don’t mind the humidity, Ma’am.”

“I know,” said Mary. “You just want to make a lot of money.”

“Well, it is a great opportunity. I’ve always wanted to run a bar on the beach. And my brother’s got the deal all lined up.”

“I’m sure it will work out just fine. But I’m really going to miss you around here.”

“I’ll miss you too, Ma’am.”

“Oh, no you won’t, Charles.” She laughed. “Now, you *are* giving me two weeks to find a replacement, right?”

“Oh, of course. I wouldn’t want to put you in a bind.”

“Good. Thanks. By the way, I hate that you missed all the excitement around here yesterday.”

“Oh, you mean the big showdown between Janice and that Kyle character?”

“Yes. It was great,” said Mary. “We got him good.” She smiled and then took a long sip from her coffee cup.

“Well, I’m sorry I missed it, Ma’am.” Charles turned around to put the coffee pot back in its place. “But I enjoyed my day off.” He smiled slyly to himself.

“I enjoyed it very much.”

THE END

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